Political Speculations.

POLITICAL SPECULATIONS,

OCCASIONED BY THE PROGRESS

OF A

DEMOCRATIC PARTY

IN

ENGLAND.

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THE publication of Mr. Burke's Reflections has occaſioned a very general diſcuſſion of the principles, both of Government in the abſtract, and of the Britiſh Conſtitution in particular. We now ſee pretty clearly, what are the prevailing political opinions of the leading men (ſo far as literature leads) in this kingdom: thoſe opinions I have examined as they have occurred; and I muſt confeſs I differ ſo materially from moſt of them, and on poſitions which if generally embraced, and ſtill more if actually carried into effect, would ſo materially involve the welfare of my country, that I feel myſelf called upon, as a citizen and a man, to avow my ſentiments, and appeal for their truth to the judgment of the public. I ſhould not, however, have been either ſo earneſt, or ſo haſty

in the publication of this Treatiſe, but from the alarming progreſs of a party whoſe principles and views I entirely diſapprove. The doctrine of ſervile obedience is now ſo generally exploded, that every effort to ſupport it can only meet with the contempt it deſerves; but the abettors of revolution and ſubverſion, appear to harangue a very attentive, and even a conſenting audience, and ſhould be oppoſed with ſpirit and with zeal, by all thoſe who conceive that their maxims and deſigns are injurious to the public welfare. In diſcharging this duty (for I conſider it as a very ſerious and important duty) I ſhall addreſs myſelf with plain facts and arguments to the common ſenſe and feelings of mankind: if I am right, I ſhall meet the ſentiments of my readers; if I am wrong, my errors will eaſily be detected: and at all events, though my underſtanding ſhould prove defective, my heart is honeſt.

Every being that exiſts, the veriеſt worm that crawls upon the duſt, is to itſelf of infinitely greater moment than all the univerſe beſides, however rich in the ſplendid appendage of innumerable beings of longer days, and mightier energies and ſublimer gratifications. We naturally, and indeed neceſſarily, refer to ourſelves whatever

whatever exiſts around us, either in the phyſical or moral world. Each of us conſiders himſelf as the centre to which whatever is, relates; and endeavours to accommodate the ſyſtem of the univerſe, ſo far as the ſphere of his activity extends, and can operate on that ſyſtem, to the gratification of his peculiar intereſts.—I intreat that my reader will not haſtily condemn me as a ſelfiſh being: I think that I poſſeſs as much of the common charities of my kind, as moſt men; and I truſt, that as my ideas become more clearly developed in the career of this treatiſe, I ſhall not be utterly deſpiſed by minds of the moſt exquiſite feelings and enlarged benevolence.—As ſoon then as we begin to reflect, we find ourſelves emerged, we know not how or when, into an order and ſyſtem of things, of the origin of which we are entirely ignorant. Had we ſprung into exiſtence on ſome uncultivated ſpot, where laws and civilization were unknown, we ſhould have found no other obſtacle to the gratification of our wiſhes, than thoſe which the inviſible hand of nature had oppoſed—an impaſſible torrent, an inacceſſible precipice, or the caſual interference of ſome animal more ſtrong or ſagacious than ourſelves: but born, as we are, into civilized ſociety, we find ourſelves reſtrained by other barriers, and curbed

by other powers, as inſuperable as the animal, the precipice, or the torrent. We feel, indeed, that we poſſeſs the powers of ſpeaking, and moving, and acting, and of exerciſing all our faculties and organs, as inclination ſhall direct; but we find, that if we exert theſe powers in ſuch a way as to conſtitute what is termed a violation of the law, we are ſeized, and bound, and impriſoned, and deprived of life, or of all thoſe nameleſs comforts which render life a bleſſing, by perſons whom we never beheld before, who call themſelves miniſters of juſtice, who are appointed expreſsly for that purpoſe, and who would treat our neighbour in the ſame way if he acted in the ſame manner; but who are ſanctioned by that neighbour, and would, if neceſſary, be aſſiſted by the collected authority of thouſands in this violent, unequal, and unprovoked attack upon my perſon. What is this power which thus ſternly controls me; this curious power, by which the authority of all is perpetually combined againſt each? I never formed it, my neighbour never formed it, no individual in the country ever formed it; I may utterly deteſt and execrate it as uſeleſs, iniquitous, and a common outrage on my kind; my neighbour may do the ſame: but it exiſts in ſpite of our wiſhes, it derides our inſignificant

cant cries, and perſiſts to operate, like ſome great law of nature, with a weight which it is impoſſible to elude, and fruitleſs to reſiſt. My indignation perhaps is rouſed; my curioſity at leaſt is excited; and I proceed to inquire in what this artificial power conſiſts, in whom it is lodged, from whence it is derived, and by what it is maintained.

My curioſity on the firſt of theſe points, is ſpeedily ſatisfied. I ſoon diſcover *that* the object of my inquiries conſiſts in the power of commanding all the inhabitants of a certain territory to act, or to abſtain from acting, at the will of the perſons inveſted with this truſt; and of enforcing obedience to theſe commands, by the infliction of ſuch penalties as muſt render it more eligible to ſubmit than to reſiſt. My aſtoniſhment is excited at an authority ſo formidable, and I proceed with trembling ſolicitude to inquire in whom it is repoſed.

I find, that, in different countries, this power is veſted in very different hands, and in very different ways, and under very different checks and modifications and reſtrictions. In ſome nations, I perceive that the people themſelves aſſemble and enact laws, and delegate their execution

execution to dependent magiſtrates: in others, I perceive that this office is exerciſed by a particular order of men, who inherit and tranſmit it: in many I behold a ſingle individual who iſſues whatever commands he thinks fit, and executes theſe orders by ſubordinate officers, who ſubſiſt at his nod, and periſh at his frown, and ramify his authority into every corner of the State: while in other countries, and particularly in my own, I diſcover that this tremendous authority, which enacts and enforces whatever it thinks fit, is divided into various portions, and veſted in diſtinct depoſitaries, who perpetually check and mutually control each other.

But in whomever this power exiſts, I am tempted to inquire from whence it is derived. I look at thoſe who are poſſeſſed of it: they are neither taller, nor ſtronger, nor wiſer, nor better men, than thouſands of their ſubjects; they are formed of the ſame ſtuff, are oppreſſed with the ſame infirmities, and periſh by the ſame means, and rot on the ſame principles as other men: from whence then do they derive a power which reſults from no internal ſuperiority in the man, either beſtowed by nature, or acquired by art? I ſearch the origin of nations through

through a veil of myſtery and fable; I examine thoſe portions of human nature which ſtill remain in a ſtate of ſavage independence or imperfect civilization; and I think I can diſcover the ſources from which this artificial power originally ſprung, the cauſes by which it has been matured, and the means by which it has devolved on its preſent poſſeſſors: but my documents are too queſtionable to afford any certain concluſion; and I turn without reluctance from a vague and barren ſpeculation, to a momentous queſtion, which admits, as it requires, a more determinate ſolution.—By what is this authority maintained? It is commonly veſted in the hands of a few; it is frequently perverted to purpoſes of general and grievous oppreſſion; yet is it patiently endured by multitudes, before whoſe collected power the authority of the moſt formidable government on earth would crumble into duſt, and be ſcattered by all the winds of heaven: but our aſtoniſhment will ceaſe when we reflect upon our own ſituation, and conſider that of others; and we ſhall attribute the quiet ſubmiſſion of the people to the want of power, as well as of will, to aſſociate and reſiſt.

That

That Government muſt be weak indeed which does not poſſeſs ſome degree of *abſolute* force in the command of a vigilant police and well diſciplined army, dependent on its pleaſure, devoted to its ſervice, and perpetually prepared to extinguiſh either individual reſiſtance, or popular revolt. I refuſe obedience to a law which ſtrikes me as iniquitous and unjuſt—I am inſtantly ſeized by the miniſters of juſtice, and dragged to priſon, and loaded with irons. I am joined by others, who are urged by the ſame motives to aſſemble and reſiſt; before we have time to collect our numbers, and organize our powers, we are ſurrounded by an armed force, and cut to pieces, or poſted upon gibbets. Had an indignant people the leiſure to combine and form themſelves into a diſciplined body, the ſovereign authority of the State would be inſtantly broken up, in whomever it reſided: but whilſt Government can make it the intereſt of any ſet of men to ſupport them, and this ſet of men is capable of ſuppreſſing ſuch an aſſociation as I have deſcribed, ſo long may that government ſubſiſt in ſafety, and act with impunity.

The mode indeed in which this is effected is curious, and deſerves to be ſtated with preciſion. We may conſider then the perſons in whom

whom the legiſlative and executive authority of the State is veſted, as one power; their civil and military dependents, as another; and the people, as a third: and it is obvious that the ſecond power is employed by the firſt, to awe the third into an obedience to that firſt power, and enable it to ſecure the ſervices of the ſecond. And, as far as the records of hiſtory reach, this game between the two firſt powers has ever been played with ſucceſs.

Yet even this admirable ſcheme of dominion would be incapable of controlling a nation of men unuſed to the yoke of laws and civilization; and Government, though it might be ſecure againſt a regular revolt, would be oppreſſed and diſtracted with the multitude of petty offenders; but we are born into ſubjection, and with the power, have almoſt loſt the will to reſiſt. The man who can feed on berries, and quaff the running brook, may mock the arm of deſpotiſm; but he who has been bred, and nurſed, and educated in the ſoft delicacies of an abundant fortune, muſt dread the overthrow of that gigantic power, which, however grim and oppreſſive, ſtill guards his property from the eager

gripe of need and rapacity: accuſtomed to all the comforts which wealth can beſtow, he cannot face the mercileſs aſſaults of cold, and hunger, and nakedneſs; and muſt look with horror to that tremendous day when ſubordination ſhall ceaſe, and anarchy begin; when his houſe ſhall be entered, his coffers deſpoiled, the barriers of his demeſnes laid proſtrate, and all the fountains of his happineſs broken up. The influence of property, therefore, and its influence muſt neceſſarily be conſiderable, will ever be in favour of ſome government or other. And though the lower and more indigent order of mankind may ſeem to owe but little to ſociety, and to have more to hope than to fear from a general wreck, yet, ſubdued as they are into habits of ſubjection, and rooted to the ſpot on which they toil, and contracted in their views of ſociety and power, and taught (as they ever are taught) to look up with reverence and awe to that magnificent obſcurity in which the preſiding authority of the State is perpetually involved, a government muſt be miſerably conducted indeed, which has any thing to dread from their ſpontaneous revolt.

I am

I am ſatisfied, then, as to the nature of the ſovereign power of a State, and the perſons in whom it reſides, and the means by which it is maintained: but there are other objects, into which my intereſt, as well as my curioſity, prompts me to enquire. I ſee in this ſovereign power a very formidable engine, which may be applied to the beſt, or perverted to the worſt of purpoſes; and I am ſtrongly urged to examine in what hands it may be diſpoſed in ſuch a way as promiſes, upon the whole, to provide in the beſt poſſible manner for the general welfare. I conſider the artificial ſyſtem of ſociety, as a part, and a moſt material part, of the great ſyſtem of things into which I am born, and upon which I am impelled by reaſon, as well as by inſtinct, to exert my faculties and organs, in moulding, and controlling, and converting it to the moſt eligible ends; and I begin my enquiries without conſulting the Rights of Man.

The natural Rights of Man, and the divine Rights of Governors, I conſider as equally a ſenſeleſs and pernicious jargon. For, what is a right but a claim under a law admitted by *both* parties? I have a right to an eſtate, of which another is poſſeſſed; but why? becauſe I have a claim to

that eſtate under the law of my country, to which the wrongful poſſeſſor admits himſelf equally ſubject with myſelf, by living and acting in the ſame ſociety: but if, ſetting aſide the municipal law of this Society, we pretend to derive our rights from any ſuperior law, from the law of Nature, or God, or Religion, or any other law which is not expreſſed in ſome univerſally acknowledged code, and ſtampt with ſome univerſally acknowledged ſeal, we ſhall involve ourſelves in endleſs error and contradiction; our claims will fluctuate and vary with our opinions, and claſh with each other, and deſtroy themſelves, and confound all order and ſociety, and peace and comfort: one man will aſſume a right of gratifying his avarice or ambition, at the expence of the tears and groans, and unavailing cries of millions; another may conſider all law whatever as an infringement of his natural rights; and we have ſeen an order of men, who, in the propagation of their ſuperſtition, have claimed and aſſerted the bloody privilege of perſecuting with relentleſs rigour whoever did not think as they thought, and act as they acted, and believe as they believed. To be ſure, between perſons who acknowledge the ſame ſuperior law, a reciprocal right exiſts. Whoever believes, like me,

that there is a God of unlimited power, conſummate wiſdom, and paternal goodneſs, who regulates the univerſe, and wills the happineſs of every created being, without queſtion that man has *a right* to all the offices of kindneſs, and help, and condolence, and brotherly affection, which it is in my power to beſtow; becauſe he can appeal to the law which we both acknowledge to be binding, and which requires theſe heavenly charities from man to man. But between an atheiſt and me, no ſuch right can poſſibly exiſt. Were I, in the plenitude of power, to drag ſuch a man to a dungeon, and ſtarve him to death, he could not in his laſt agonies complain of any violation of his rights, any more than if by ſome convulſion of nature the earth had ſwallowed him up, and incloſed him in its entrails. —God forbid that I ſhould treat any man in ſuch a way, whatever were his principles! God forbid that I ſhould not feel myſelf bound to love him with the fondneſs of a brother! All that I contend for is, that HE could derive no claim on me, nor I on him, under a law which he deſpiſes and derides.

Waving, therefore, all conſiderations of the Rights of Man either to govern others or himſelf,

ſelf, as a queſtion calculated only to perplex the truth, and ſerve as a pretext to cover the real deſigns of men, whether they be of ſubjection or ſubverſion, I reſt my project on the broad and ſubſtantial baſis of fact; and inſtead of pauſing on the viſionary rights, I direct my attention to what will ever be the meaſure of thoſe rights, the actual will and power of mankind. When I look at the people, I behold a maſs of men, each of whom is neceſſarily determined, by an invincible inſtinct, to purſue his own peculiar welfare: I behold too, in this maſs, a power, which, after all, is beyond meaſure formidable, and which, in this country, and in many others, may be conſtitutionally exerted with infinite effect. In pointing out, therefore, to the beſt of my judgment, what government is, and what is not well calculated to provide for the good of each individual who lives under it, I propoſe an end, which, (whatever be my motive for doing it) is certainly not chimerical.

The error of our modern zealots for the reform of governments, conſiſts in conſidering liberty as the object, and not as the means. I make no doubt but that many of theſe gentlemen

men are actuated by the moſt pure, and, in ſome reſpects, by the moſt laudable motives; but we certainly diſcover in their works, a much ſtronger attention to the honour, than to the happineſs of human nature: ſtung with indignation at beholding a multitude controlled by a few, they are anxious to reſtore the inſulted dignity of man, by veſting the ſupreme power of the State, not in the beſt and wiſeſt hands, and under the moſt prudent limitations and judicious controls, but in ſuch hands as will afford the leaſt idea of an offenſive ſuperiority of man over man, and, conſequently, in as many hands as poſſible. If this be really the object of theſe gentlemen, let them only openly avow it, and I have done; neither honour nor dignity will feed the hungry, nor clothe the naked, nor increaſe population, nor multiply the comforts of life, nor perform any of thoſe numberleſs good offices which we expect, and which we are entitled to expect, from a wiſe and good conſtitution; yet, if the people will prefer them, on a fair compariſon, without queſtion they may do ſo; but mankind ſhall not be *deluded*, nor will I ſuffer theſe real and permanent bleſſings to be *ignorantly* ſacrificed to a fleeting and unſubſtantial viſion.

No

No ſociety can poſſibly ſubſiſt without laws: if any man then ſeriouſly wiſhes to break up all ſociety, and reduce men to acorns and water, I have nothing to ſay to him; but, addreſſing myſelf (as I do addreſs myſelf) to thoſe who mean that ſociety ſhould be preſerved, and only debate about the diſpoſal of the governing power, I muſt ſolemnly enquire, whether a law is either the better or the worſe for the perſons by whom it is paſſed? whether a ſalutary law is the leſs ſo, for being enacted by one hundred perſons, inſtead of one hundred thouſand? or an iniquitous one the leſs ſo for being enacted by one hundred thouſand, and not by one hundred? The ſuppoſition is prepoſterous: if the law be good, it is good; and if it be bad, it is bad; though the one were decreed by a ſingle dæmon, and the other by a legion of angels. It is not liberty, then, or the veſting the legiſlative authority in as many hands as poſſible, but the proſpect of obtaining wiſe and ſalutary laws, which ought to be the great object of our attention in the formation and reformation of governments.

I have thus far conſidered liberty in the light of a public benefit; I ſuſpect, however, it is generally

generally purſued as a perſonal privilege, and as a perſonal privilege I am ſure it is of much leſs importance than is uſually imagined. Let us conceive ten millions of people under the pureſt democracy that fancy can create; ſo pure that not a law is paſſed which is not ratified by a majority of perſons, of either ſex, and every age, who are capable of giving or with-holding their conſent; let us ſuppoſe, (and the ſuppoſition is ſurely not chimerical), that under this republican conſtitution, a law is enacted which injures me moſt deeply, which declares (for example) the profeſſion in which I have engaged under the ſanction of the law, and upon which I have reſted all my future hopes and proſpects in life, illegal; and turns me adrift, without preparation or reſources, upon a wide and mercileſs world: ſhall I be told, by way of conſolation for my ſorrows, that I am the citizen of a free government, and poſſeſſed the glorious privilege of ſupporting or reſiſting, by my ſuffrage, the meaſure under which I ſuffer? I hope, I truſt, that no ſuch conſolation would be offered; becauſe, endowed as I am with the common feelings and paſſions of man, I might find it difficult to preſerve that moderation which it is ever diſ-

graceful to loſe; but, would my temper bear me up, I ſhould anſwer my comforter thus—The meaſure which I execrate is paſſed—my ſtruggles were in vain, and I am bound by a law which I abhor:—You tell me of my privilege of voting: I exerted that privilege, and I ſee its value; I ſee that the ten millionth ſhare in a power which may blaſt in an inſtant my fondeſt expectations, and cut up the ſources of my comforts through life, is a ſhadow and a mockery!

I am ſorry to have been obliged to ſay ſo much upon this ſubject: the taſk, I am well aware, is extremely invidious; and I know how eaſy it would be for ſome popular declaimer, who ſways the ſceptre of *ſound*, to pervert my ideas, and hold me out to public execration as an abettor of deſpotiſm and ſervitude. But my deſign is fixed, and ſhall not be ſhaken: I look, and will perſiſt to look, with a ſteady and inflexible eye, to the general welfare of my country and of poſterity; nor will I ſuffer *my* attention, nor, if poſſible, the attention of my reader, to be diverted from this object, by the expectation of a bleſſing, or the apprehenſion of a curſe. I think I have the good of the people as much at

heart as the warmeſt patriot living: I am one of the people myſelf, and have nothing to hope or to fear which is not common to all; but I muſt be permitted again and again to contend, that it is the public *welfare*, and not the public *freedom*, to which our attention and zeal ſhould be directed. Freedom, or an influence of the people in legiſlation, may be, nay I inſiſt it is, materially conducive to the general welfare of the State, and to all the happy fruits of a wiſe and excellent conſtitution: but then we ſhould conſider it as the *means*, and not as the end; as a means we ſhould endeavour to adapt it to its end, nor raſhly conclude, that becauſe we have made a people free, that we have therefore made them happy.

Hopeleſs indeed would be the ſituation of mankind, if they were happy only in proportion as they were really free; ſince of all the ſchemes of republicaniſm I ever heard or read of, I never met with any which, comparatively with the object at which it aimed, could be ſaid to have made the moſt trivial approaches to it. For, what is freedom? Either it is a mere ſound and a watch-word, or it means "the being

bound by no law, to which one has not actually conſented to be bound, either by conſenting to that law ſpecifically, or by conſenting to the legiſlative authority of the power which impoſed it:" for, if I may be bound by a law which I abhor, and enacted by a power whoſe legiſlative authority I never acknowledged, and utterly diſclaim, you may call this freedom, or a hobby, or a rattle, or whatever you pleaſe; but it is certainly a *thing* to which I feel no very violent propenſity. Now, what is the ſituation of a man who is born into the pureſt of republics? —He is bound by laws which were enacted centuries before him, by perſons whoſe carcaſes are mouldered into duſt, and whoſe particular views and paſſions, and prejudices and intereſts, are extinguiſhed for ever! Is this freedom? But what is his ſituation in reſpect to thoſe laws which are paſſed after he is emerged into the character of a man and a citizen? He is bound by a majority—I intreat the attention of the reader—he is bound by a majority, before he has ever conſented that a majority ſhall bind him. But why ſhould a majority bind him? Why ſhould five million and one man preſume to lord it with arbitrary ſway, over four million nine hundred and ninety-nine thouſand nine hundred

hundred and ninety-nine, in every reſpect as good and able and intelligent perſons as themſelves? He may not think this point extremely clear; he may call for their reaſons, and reſiſt their authority; but the bloody logic of deſpotiſm, the chain, the axe, and the gibbet, will ſoon convince him of his error, and ſilence his objections! Good God! ſhall I be told that this is freedom? But it will be ſaid, that ſuch a degree of freedom as would remove this charge, can never be obtained under any government whatever. I know it cannot: I know that all government muſt neceſſarily be the ſtern dominion of ſuperior force over unavailing reſiſtance and reluctant ſubmiſſion: but if we cannot make the people free, let us endeavour to make them happy.

When I look upon human nature, and conſider the tremendous magnitude of legiſlative power, I am ſtruck with diſmay, and feel myſelf at a loſs to diſcover in what mortal hands ſo momentous a charge can with ſafety be repoſed. Is it expedient that this power ſhould reſide in the hands of a ſingle individual and his poſterity for ever? The propoſition is monſtrous. It is impoſſible to contemplate, without horror, ſuch a being

a being as man, whoſe views of things at beſt muſt neceſſarily be extremely partial; who is agitated by the fierce paſſions of luſt and anger, and avarice and ambition; and who ſometimes—for on a ſubject ſo important, the remoteſt chance is of moment—who ſometimes appears to take a ſavage and unnatural delight in blood, deſpair, and devaſtation; it is impoſſible to contemplate without horror, ſuch a being ſingly inveſted with an abſolute dominion over the lives, and limbs, and property, and all the innumerable ſprings of the domeſtic comforts, and ſocial endearments, and fond expectations of millions of his equals! The human mind revolts at the idea; nor need I expatiate on a ſubject where I am ſure I am anticipated with fierce impatience by every man on earth, whoſe faculties are not utterly depraved by the habits of inveterate ſervitude and incurable prejudice.

Is it expedient then for the public welfare, that this power ſhould reſide in the majority of the people? A very conſiderable, or at leaſt a very conſpicuous party in this kingdom, appears to conſider every government as pure and perfect only as it approaches to this imaginary ſtandard,

ſtandard, for imaginary it inevitably muſt be in every populous and extenſive empire: I muſt confeſs, however, when I calmly conſider the perſons of which a majority of the people muſt neceſſarily be compoſed, I can ſee but little in ſuch an aſſembly which can poſſibly qualify it for the high and important functions of a legiſlative body. I never behold indeed any unuſual concourſe of the people without aſtoniſhment and awe: it preſents itſelf to my imagination under the formidable image of the vaſt and mighty deep, which no human power can limit, no human wiſdom control, and a breath from any quarter of the compaſs may agitate into wild and tumultuous commotion!—We ſhould look at men as they are, and not as we would have them; and fit our inſtitutions for beings of fleſh and blood, and not for the prepoſterous phantoms of a heated imagination. And of what does a multitude conſiſt, (on a ſubject of ſuch moment it is folly to be ſqueamiſh), of what does it conſiſt? Does it not principally conſiſt of men whoſe faculties are benumbed by a perpetual recurrence of the ſame inſipid toil, day after day, and year after year; whoſe reaſoning principle is buried, and almoſt extinguiſhed in ignorance and prejudice; and whoſe

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paſſions may be inflamed to madneſs by a ſound, and blindly impelled by an eloquent demagogue, to the infliction of irretrievable and inexpiable ruin? A thouſand conſiderations may reſtrain a *ſingle* deſpot in the exerciſe of his power; the dread of poiſon or a dagger in the hands of deſperate revenge, the horrid thought of deep and univerſal execration, the very ſenſe of perſonal ſhame amongſt his equals, and amongſt mankind, may deter him from any groſs, any abominable violation of the eternal laws of juſtice and humanity; but a deſpotic *multitude* is abſolutely without control: It may ſubvert and deſolate, and cruſh, and exerciſe upon an obnoxious party the moſt inhuman cruelties; no power can reſiſt it, no power can call it to account; and the ſame circumſtance which annihilates all fear of danger, extinguiſhes all principle of ſhame.

After all, too, it is impracticable to communicate to the people at large, by any privilege of voting, that freedom and weight in legiſlation, for which our modern reformiſts are ſo zealouſly contending; for, in ſpite of any regulations, the poſſeſſion of wealth will neceſſarily and

and unavoidably confer a certain degree of power; and in no inſtance will this adventitious power be in reality ſo great as under a pure republic, becauſe under no other form of government can the influence of wealth be employed to ſuch important ends. We muſt here again conſider mankind as they are, and not as we would wiſh them; we may figure to ourſelves a republic of patriots, who, in the exerciſe of their ſuffrages, ſhould be actuated only by the moſt pure and diſintereſted motives: But is ſuch the general character of mankind? Can we act with ſecurity upon the ſuppoſition of ſo much virtue, or ſhould we truſt to its exiſtence in any of the important concerns of private life? We know the contrary. —It is poſſible, indeed, in ſome meaſure, to arreſt the progreſs of direct corruption; but there is a ſecret influence attached to property, which it is impoſſible to deſtroy. Whoever is rich, is in poſſeſſion of that to which every one aſpires; and, in the expenditure of his revenue, though in the purchaſe of the moſt fair and honeſt induſtry, or in the fruits of that induſtry, he muſt unavoidably give a preference, and create dependants. To ſuppoſe that theſe dependants will ſacrifice their daily bread, and all

the urgent claims of domeſtic affection, to the remote proſpect of public good, is expecting more than we can, perhaps more than we have a right to expect, from the frailty of human nature, and which whenever we do expect, we ſhall be uniformly deceived. Whatever legiſlative authority, therefore, theſe dependants poſſeſs, will inſtantly be transferred to thoſe on whom they depend, and who command their ſuffrages; and inſtead of a pure and perfect democracy, we ſhall only have attained a pernicious oligarchy, where riches predominate, and where the meaſures of the rich are apparently ſanctioned by the general will. Let us look at our county elections, and every ſyllable that I have aſſerted will be confirmed by the infallible teſt of fact and experience; although in all ſuch elections, thoſe perſons are excluded, in whom a defect of knowledge and independence may principally be expected. Were an Angel from Heaven to come down and offer himſelf to the freeholders as one of their repreſentatives in Parliament, if he were not ſupported, as it is probable he would not, by ſome conſiderable landed intereſts upon earth, the cœleſtial candidate would ſcarcely gain a vote. In anſwer to

theſe obſervations, I have heard it contended, that we muſt fit our inſtitutions for perfect beings, if we would wiſh to render mankind perfect; but will any inſtitution ſuſpend the operation of natural and inevitable cauſes? Will any inſtitution convert a day-labourer into an independent gentleman and a philoſopher? I really do not know what regenerating powers theſe gentlemen may poſſeſs; but as ſuch a converſion, I ſhould conceive, muſt at leaſt be a work of time, I could wiſh to ſee ſome proviſion made for human nature, till the tranſmutation were effected.

Wherever the legiſlative power reſides, there deſpotiſm muſt neceſſarily exiſt; ſince whoever can bind another by whatever laws he pleaſes, poſſeſſes the higheſt authority which man can exerciſe over man. Such an authority, I have endeavoured to ſhew, cannot with ſafety be repoſed, either in a ſingle individual, or in the majority of a multitude. It will be aſked, in what hands then can it be intruſted? The queſtion is momentous; it involves moſt materially the happineſs of multitudes exiſting, and of multitudes unborn, and ſhould be approached, not in the ſpirit of impaſſioned zeal or captious innovation, but with a calm and

ſerious and awful attention—I had almoſt ſaid, with ſome portion of that deep humiliation and fearful diffidence, with which we addreſs ourſelves to the majeſty of God himſelf.

Could we diſcover any order of men, or even any ſingle individual, who poſſeſſed both the will and the power to benefit mankind, who poſſeſſed a view of things ſufficiently comprehenſive to know what laws would contribnte to the general welfare, and a diſpoſition ſufficiently benevolent to carry ſuch laws into effect; and could we at the ſame time adopt ſome ſure mode, in which ſuch an order of men, or even ſuch a ſingle individual, ſhould in all inſtances inevitably ſucceed to the legiſlative authority of the ſtate, our object would be accompliſhed, and we might repoſe, after our toil, with the ſublime ſatisfaction of having concerted the very beſt form of government that human nature could receive. But a little reflection will ſoon convince us, that ſuch a ſcheme is altogether impracticable. Without doubt, ſuch an inclination and ſuch abilities as I have deſcribed, exiſt amongſt mankind; but how—for that is the difficulty—how ſhall we ſecure their appointment to the legiſlative power? Shall we truſt for this purpoſe to hereditary ſucceſſion? But neither

neither virtues nor talents are hereditary; and the wiſeſt and beſt of fathers frequently beholds in his ſon, an ideot, or a ſcoundrel. Shall we truſt to the operation of choice? But, who are to chooſe, where nearly the ſame qualifications are required in thoſe who elect, and in thoſe who are elected?—Shall we, then, with the petulant perverſeneſs of children, reject the good we have, becauſe it is no better? By no means: we ſhould firſt endeavour to avail ourſelves in the beſt manner, of whatever excellence we poſſeſs; and when we have exhauſted this ſmall, but ineſtimable treaſure, we ſhould deſcend into the regions of vice and diſorder, and try to extract from the paſſions and frailties of our ſpecies, what we never can expect from their talents or their virtues. I know that ſuch a plan is not exactly accommodated to the taſte of the regenerators of mankind: theſe gentlemen are fond of ſimplicity; they ſee indeed, that their abſtract principles will not perfectly apply to the complicated views, diſpoſitions, and prejudices and intereſts of mankind; but rather than ſtoop from their aërial metaphyſics to the level of common ſenſe and experience, they would ſtretch human nature upon the bed of Procruſtes, and adapt it, by diſtortion, to their wild and extravagant ſpeculations. And ſuch a

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ſcheme indeed is not altogether impracticable: it is poſſible to diffuſe ſuch an enthuſiaſm amongſt the people as will fit it for the moſt romantic inſtitution: But a ſtate of enthuſiaſm is not a ſtate of nature; and as ſoon as ever mankind begins to relapſe into its original tone, and ſubſide to its natural level, the inſtitution muſt either gradually give way, or be ſuddenly broken up.

We *have* a Conſtitution; we have at leaſt a form of Government, (for, "we muſt ſpeak by the card, or equivocation will undo us.") This form of government has ſubſiſted long, and has undergone repeated alterations and amendments. I certainly do not mean to inſinuate that antiquity is any proof of the excellence of a government; the worſt of governments may ſubſiſt for centuries: but this I muſt be permitted to contend, that where a government has admitted (as ours has admitted) of ſucceſſive alterations, and has received (as ours has received) ſucceſſive amendments; where, as thoſe grievances and evils which attend every human inſtitution have preſented themſelves to the experience of ages, they have been remedied, or alleviated, by all the collected wiſdom, and information, and patriotic exertions, which thoſe ages

ages have produced; that we are not raſhly to pull down this venerable fabric, whoſe advantages we feel, and with the extent of whoſe defects we are perfectly acquainted, to make way for a new and haſtily-erected edifice, of whoſe merits and whoſe faults we muſt as men be deplorably ignorant; unleſs it ſhould appear, upon a ſerious and ſober examination, that the original ſtructure is in reality ſo radically bad that it is altogether incapable of a wiſe and rational reform. But, is ſuch the condition of our conſtitution? Is this conſtitution, once the boaſt of Engliſhmen, and the envy of Europe, ſo abſolutely vicious in its very elementary principles, or ſo utterly depraved by inveterate corruptions, that no judicious regulations, no temperate reform, can ſupply its defects, and rectify its abuſes, and adapt it for the control of an age which has been called, and under ſome reſtrictions juſtly called, an age of philoſophy and reaſon? I muſt confeſs I cannot think ſo. Whether I conſider it in theory, or in practice; whether I view it as a cauſe, or contemplate its effects, I can diſcover in it none of thoſe incurable evils which will juſtify (as they alone can juſtify) the deſperate expedient of violent ſubverſion, under the forlorn hope of a regeneration, through fire, and blood, and tumult, and diſorder.

It may be ſaid of Conſtitutions, what a once celebrated, but now neglected Teacher obſerved of men, " By their fruits ſhall ye know them :" I am content, I am anxious, that our conſtitution ſhould be tried by this teſt. When I look at my country, when I conſider its population and its riches, its innumerable villages and crowded cities, its agriculture, its manufactures and its commerce, its ſtock of induſtry, of learning, and of virtue, and of all that is uſeful and excellent and great; when I contemplate its laws, and all the provident forms, and cautious maxims, and well-regulated tribunals by which thoſe laws and juſtice are adminiſtered; when I conſider with what an anxious, what a tender ſolicitude, the perſon and property of the pooreſt man in the kingdom is guarded againſt rapacious power and inſolent oppreſſion; and when I compare theſe great and invaluable benefits with the ſtate of other countries, poſſeſſed of richer ſoils, and wider territories, and happier climates—when I advert to myſelf, and conſider who I am, and what I enjoy; when I reflect, that I may ſpend a life of comfort, peace and ſecurity in the poſſeſſion and diffuſion of rational enjoyment, that I am reſtrained by no laws, and alarmed by no terrors which diſturb my domeſtic eaſe and ſocial pleaſures, or unfit me for performing the high

duties of a friend to my country and to mankind; but that I may think, and ſpeak, and act as becomes a wiſe and a good man—I cannot curſe the ſource of all theſe bleſſings: I cannot call with loud and importunate clamours for its deſtruction; nor vote the conſtitution under which I live, and enjoy theſe benefits, a grievance to human nature. Yet has this conſtitution been the object of a general and unqualified attack; a ſpirit of fierce, and even of unnatural reſentment appears to have poſſeſſed its opponents; and the mixed artillery of wit, and logic, and declamation, has been levelled againſt it, as againſt a thing altogether abominable, both in its conſtituent parts, and in the general aſſemblage of the whole.

The Houſe of Commons has been arraigned, and deſervedly arraigned, I grant; but then, when we come to examine what are the objections urged againſt it, we find that thoſe who are the moſt clamorous in the abuſe, are of all others the moſt unfit to correct, ſince of all others they appear the leaſt acquainted either with the evil or the remedy. It has been arraigned, becauſe it is not a complete repreſentation of the people: but what man of ſenſe ever conſidered the Houſe of Commons as

being in reality any repreſentation of the people at all? It neither is, nor, from its nature, can it ever be rendered ſuch a repreſentation. Were this aſſembly in fact the mere organ through which the people ſpoke, whenever that voice was heard, the authority of Kings and Lords ſhould crumble into duſt. But the people of England will not degrade their majeſty, by connecting it with any earthly power whatever: they conſider, and rightly conſider, that the proper object of *every* part of our government is *their* welfare; they look upon the Houſe of Commons as only a part of that government, and they are ſatisfied if that Houſe be filled with men properly qualified for their high office, whoever elects them. But is that Houſe ſo filled? Moſt aſſuredly it is not; nor ſhall we obtain this end by veſting the right of ſuffrage indiſcriminately in all, ſince, whilſt we think we are imparting a valuable and a uſeful privilege, we are in fact only throwing authority into the hands of the poor and dependant, to ſwell the influence of the rich and powerful. It is by extinguiſhing the dwindled boroughs, and ſhortening the duration of Parliaments, and veſting the power of election in the hands of thoſe who are moſt likely to exerciſe that power with freedom and independence, that we alone

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can expect to ſend into St. Stephen's ſuch a body of men as the Houſe of Commons ought to be, a patriotic and vigorous aſſembly, ſolicitous for the public good, and ſenſibly alive to every encroachment of prerogative.

The Houſe of Peers has been arraigned. A ſprightly, but ſuperficial writer, has levelled the ſhafts of his ridicule againſt *hereditary* honours and *hereditary* privileges; and truly, if ſuch honours and ſuch privileges were calculated merely for the benefit of the poſſeſſor, the ſatyr would be ſtrictly juſt, and highly commendable: but, conſidering them in the light in which we ought to conſider them, as rights and immunities intended for the public benefit, as privileges veſted in particular individuals, for the purpoſe of conſtituting a body of men, whoſe duty and whoſe intereſt it muſt be to preſent a barrier between the Commons and the Crown, and reſiſt ſuch encroachments on either ſide as would be detrimental to the Conſtitution; could a happier expedient have been fixed upon, for the appointment of perſons to that high truſt, by a power independent (as it ought to be) both of the Commons and the Crown, than by placing ſuch appointment in the hands of Nature, as ſhe operates by hereditary ſucceſſion?

The Crown has been arraigned. That ſplendor and power which our Conſtitution has attached to the Throne, has been ſeverely condemned as an unjuſt and hateful ſuperiority of man over man. In anſwer to ſuch attacks, I can do little more than repeat what I have before obſerved. If we conſider this majeſty and power as intended merely to gratify the pampered appetite of a ſingle individual, at the expence of ſuffering millions, I ſhould deſpiſe and deteſt that man whoſe ſoul was not ſtung with a deep and poignant indignation. But if, viewing this ſubject as a philoſopher ought to view it, we find, that by covering a man with robes, and calling him a King, and inveſting him with a limited authority, we create a Magiſtrate highly uſeful to the State; if we find that his very thinking himſelf the important perſonage we repreſent him, tends to make him perform his part in this great drama with better effect, ſhall we, as philoſophers, who pierce through the diſguiſe, be offended at the dignity he aſſumes, and the awe he impreſſes?

But it is not from partial and broken views of our Conſtitution, that we can collect any adequate idea either of its merits or defects; we muſt look for this purpoſe at the general aſſemblage

blage of the whole, and obſerve how each conſtituent part ſtands connected with the reſt, what particular views it is adapted to promote, and what particular vices it is calculated to correct. It is from the multifarious limitations and extenſions of the power of each of theſe conſtituent parts, from the conflict of their various and frequently oppoſite intereſts, from their happy co-operation and reciprocal control, that we derive whatever is excellent in our government and laws; and it is by operating on theſe conſtituent parts, by judiciouſly augmenting the influence of ſome, and diminiſhing that of others, as circumſtances ſhall require, and wiſdom direct, that we alone can expect to produce, and tranſmit to our children, the rich inheritance of a good and permanent form of government. And we may hope to do ſo, whilſt we preſerve the principles on which our conſtitution is founded; for they are the principles of ſound ſenſe and ſober reaſon, and not the wild chimæras of a luxuriant fancy. The nature of our government does not require a greater ſhare of patriotic virtue, than may reaſonably be expected in mankind: it looks upon human nature as it is; it ſuppoſes that men in general will purſue their private intereſts, in preference to the public good; and in

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the diſtribution of the ſovereign power, it aims, with a ſingular felicity, to render the purſuit of theſe private intereſts the very means of accompliſhing the general welfare.

The conduct of a neighbouring kingdom has been held out to us as worthy of a cloſe and ſpirited imitation. I certainly do not blame the French for any thing they have done; I do not know, that, circumſtanced as they were, they could with ſafety have acted otherwiſe than they did: But, are we to purſue, from choice, what they performed through neceſſity? Or, becauſe a man whoſe houſe is in flames, may take a leap from the attics, is another in ſport to do the ſame? For a rational and temperate reform, I ſhall ever be an earneſt advocate. The alarming progreſs of taxation is, I think, the moſt ſerious evil we can complain of, and demands our immediate attention; the extent of corrupt influence, which may be conſidered in a great meaſure as the ſource of this evil, calls loudly for reſtriction: but on theſe, and on all other public queſtions, let us preſerve the temper and diſcretion of men; let us be animated, if you will, with patriotic zeal, but not impelled by the delirious ſpirit of political fanaticiſm.

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I have only a word to add, and I have done. I have not annexed my name to this Treatiſe, from a conviction that *that* name could not poſſibly add a weight to any thing I have advanced: but, ſhould it ever become expedient for the public to know who it is that hath addreſſed them, I will not withhold it for a moment. I may incur the cenſure of many whoſe friendſhip and eſteem it is my warmeſt wiſh to ſecure; I may expoſe the volume of my life to vigilant and jealous eyes; but I confide in the rectitude of my intentions, nor am I afraid that my conduct will ever belie my profeſſions.

LONDON, May 14th, 1791.

FINIS.